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MINISTRY TO YOUTH: BACK TO THE FUTURE; AROUND THE WORLD; FAMILY-BASED
YOUTH MINISTRY; PLAYING AS A TEAM; "ALTERNATIVE TYPES" IN A YOUTH GROUP

Theology, News and Notes

JUNE 2000

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Reaching Out to the New Adolescent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Reaching Out to the New Adolescent 2

CHAPMAN R. CLARK

Back to the Future of Youth Ministry 4

MARK W. CANNISTER

Youth Ministry Around the World 8

PAUL BORTHWICK

I'm the Minister to Youth and Their Families—Now What? 14

MARK DE VRIES

Playing as a Team 17

KARA ECKMANN POWELL

An Open Letter to Youth Leaders 21

CHRISTINA JACOBSON AND JOCELYN SHERMAN

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Reaching Out to the New Adolescent

BY CHAPMAN R. CLARK

Some contend that "youth ministry" has been around for more than a century. But contemporary youth ministry, the expression of youth ministry practiced in most churches (and even parachurch groups) was defined in the sixties and seventies and perfected in the eighties and early nineties. During this time youth ministry as a movement has become a powerful force in the church, as evidenced by the number of youth ministry professionals; the proliferation of youth ministry organizations and academic programs; and the influence of youth ministry leaders, teachers, speakers, and musicians. Clearly, youth ministry has made its mark on the church worldwide.

In the meantime, the relatively recent social invention known as "adolescence" has experienced a subtle yet progressive march away from the protective umbrella of societal support. Yale psychiatrist David Elkind labels this trend the "cultural abandonment" of the young, and the adult institutions as the chief culprits.¹ Elkind's thesis is that children, and especially adolescents, are the casualties of adults seeking to "find themselves" in their quest for fulfillment and self-actualization. This abandonment of the young has created an atmosphere where, from the time a child reaches puberty, he or she finds him- or herself set adrift in a cultural sea with neither a compass nor a map. Parents have allowed, and at times even encouraged, the media, educational institutions (public and private), coaches, activity directors, and day-care workers to fulfill the role of rearing, training, nurturing, and guiding adolescents. The societal assumption for the last 30 or more years has been that once a child reaches junior high, parents have completed their task.

With the systemic breakdown of those institutions created to nurture and protect the young, adolescents have been left to fend for themselves. For the past decade or so, there has

been a marked attempt by parents, teachers, and others who work with kids to be more present than their counterparts during the seventies and eighties. But this has shown to be more "show than go," for even those parents that are involved so often relegate their relationship to their children to the realm of activities and "doing something together." The parent who coaches or videotapes the soccer team, for example, as a way to "be involved" and show their love and support, more often than not perpetuates the performance and superficial deity of our culture. Everywhere they turn, kids are pushed to look just right, to do more, and to be better. Whether it is in school or sports, dance or drama, today's adolescents have been given the clear message that they matter and are important so long as they "stay inside the lines"—and they have been left on their own to figure out just exactly what that means.

Then there is the church. The last 30 years the church has made the shift from being what Dennis Guernsey in 1982 called a "family of families"² to a rag-tag, fragmented collection of competing constituencies, communities, and "ministries." Since the advent of youth ministry, adolescents have been segmented apart from the local congregation, and the leadership of the youth ministry movement has done little to reintegrate kids into the life of the church. As young people attempt to find their way in a societal system that has abandoned them, even the one place ontologically commissioned to care for them has left them behind.

Youth ministry today comprises a wide variety of programmatic expressions and theological convictions, but the constants seem to be universal—few adults really involved in the lives of kids, an adult church that struggles with change and would rather the young would "be still and be silent," and yearly graduates that are no more ready to assimilate into the larger community than they were as little children. The church has also abandoned the young.

The problem is systemic, and it is also massive. For in a culture which has overseen the advent of lengthened adolescence, postmodern relativism, and sexual self-centeredness, the young are desperate for the love of God expressed through the nurturing touch of the church. They may say they want to be left alone, but they also cry out for any hand that is willing to reach out to them. Youth ministry cannot and *should* not solve such a deeply entrenched issue on its own. Youth ministry *must* be about an *entire congregation's* commitment to the young, both those in the congregation and

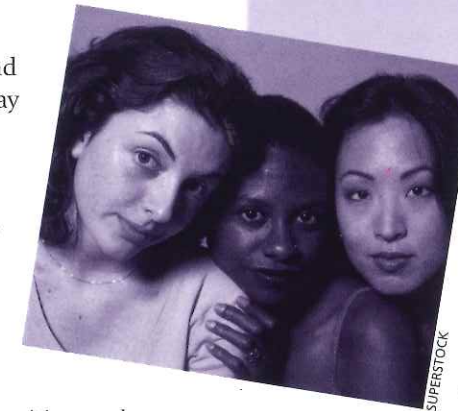
those outside.

This issue is dedicated to caring for young people. The authors take different tacks and have differing opinions as to how youth ministry should look, but they are all intent on one purpose: stirring the church to rethink God's desire and plan to reach into the world of adolescents. The last

[We must] attend to, and appreciate, every child's uniqueness. . . . As parents and teachers we need to emphasize who our children are and what they can do, rather than who they are not, and what they cannot do. By focusing on each child as a unique and special person, we help expand the range of normality for all young people.

David Elkind

Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance (Harvard University Press, 1994)



SUPERSTOCK

article is actually a letter from two self-described "alternative" college students who want us to hear their story. They offer a helpful reminder that this issue is not about programs and philosophies, it is about people.

The Scriptures teach us to pass on the faith "from generation to generation," yet few congregations are willing to hear the cries and respond to the longings of the rising generation. This is fast becoming the most sobering crisis facing the contemporary church, and yet there are so few outside of *youth ministry* who are willing to address it. Perhaps Fuller Seminary's and *Theology, News, and Notes'* willingness to take on this issue and address the needs of the young will move us a few steps closer to seeing what God sees when it comes to kids: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

ENDNOTES

1. David Elkind, *Ties That Stress* (Harvard, 1994).

2. Dennis Guernsey, *A New Design for Family Ministry* (Cook, 1982).



CHAPMAN R. CLARK, Ph.D., the integrator of this issue of *Theology, News and Notes*, is associate professor of youth and family ministries and director of the Youth Ministry Program in Fuller's School of Theology. Before joining Fuller in 1997, Dr. Clark founded and chaired the Youth and Family Ministries Department

at Denver Seminary. Previously, he coordinated Young Life's Institute of Youth Ministries, a leadership-training partnership program with Fuller. Among his popular writings are: *Next Time I Fall in Love* (Zondervan, 1991); *The Performance Illusion* (NavPress, 1993); *The Youth Worker's Guide to Family Ministry* (Zondervan, 1997); and *Daughters and Dads* (NavPress, 1998).

Today's adolescents have been given the clear message that they matter and are important so long as they "stay inside the lines."

Back to the Future of Youth Ministry

BY MARK W. CANNISTER

In far too many cases today, youth ministry is neither focused on youth nor evangelistic in its ministry.

Youth ministry is a very slippery topic. It is difficult to even pinpoint its origin because youth ministry has yet to be well-defined. I spend a lot of time these days off-campus, speaking to youth leaders, training volunteers, and consulting with various church boards and committees about youth ministry.

One of the things that fascinates me is the incredible variety of job descriptions that fall under the heading of "youth ministry." When I'm introduced to a church staff, I can pretty much nail each staff member's job description just by his or her title. We all know the responsibilities of a senior pastor, a choir director, a children's minister, a director of Christian education. While the "generalist" associate pastor's job is still a mystery, many even have descriptive titles these days—associate for visitation, associate for discipleship, associate for missions. But put a dozen youth ministers in a room, listen to them describe their jobs, and one would be hard-pressed to conclude that they are all serving in the same field of ministry!

For nearly a quarter-century, Ted Ward, a professor of education from Michigan State University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has promoted his notion that "Christian education is neither." Ward has contended that Christian education is neither thoroughly Christian nor soundly educational. I believe that we are on the verge of declaring a similar fate for youth ministry. As we arrive at the dawn of the twenty-first century, nearly 100 years into the field we call *youth ministry*, it is my contention that "youth ministry is neither."

As youth ministry evolves, it appears to be becoming more and more a mere shadow of itself. Historically, youth ministry has been a missional focus strategically targeted to adolescents. And while there are notable exceptions, in far too many cases today, youth ministry is neither focused on youth nor evangelistic in its ministry.

Focused on Youth?

Youth ministry has become concerned with everything *other* than adolescents. Today, many consider 10-, 9-, 8-, and even 7-year-olds to be part of the company of youth ministry. These children

are just that, children—and while they certainly need to be cared for, they are not what the church has traditionally labeled "youth." The time is right for focused children's ministries to provide an adequate ministry for prepubescent children. Youth ministry, however, must be seen as unique in that it is a ministry focused on adolescents—that part of the lifespan that is neither child nor adult, generally marked by puberty.

Marking the other end of adolescence is more difficult. Our society has extended adolescence well into the twenty-something range. However, those who include young adults in the job description of youth ministers would do well to reconsider the contrast in nature between the life of an adolescent and someone who is considered to be a young adult.

Another issue that has emerged is the programmatic trend in the church to "family ministry." There has been much written about youth ministry as also needing to be concerned with this nebulous movement called *family ministry*. As I understand the task of youth ministry, nothing could be more of an imposition to youth ministry than to expand it into family ministry! Now don't get me wrong here, I'm not being anti-family. I love my family, and I'm sure that you love your family. And the Body of Christ is certainly called to be the family of God. But just because the church is failing in its obligation to minister to the family, it is vital not to dilute the primary mission of youth ministry.

Mark DeVries' claims that youth ministry has alienated itself on the outer edge of the church. I agree. However, this is not necessarily a distinctive of youth ministry. According to Chapman Clark, the entire church is alienated on the outer edge.² We are a fragmented church of ministry departments and foci for every possible constituency—children, youth, singles, young adults, women, men, seniors, and so forth. Youth ministry should not be uniquely saddled with the complex notion of family ministry. A decade ago, before family ministry was in vogue, sociologist Tony Campolo warned youth ministers about family ministry. He argued that to burden the youth minister with the whole family would create conflict within the pastoral staff, detract from the primary goal of youth ministry and alienate youth from the mentor-like relationship they typically

enjoy with their youth minister.³ Family ministry, then, is the by-product of the proper integration of all the ministries of the church and should ultimately be the responsibility of the senior pastor and the elders of the congregation, not the youth minister.

David Elkind has suggested that there are few adults in our postmodern culture genuinely committed to teenagers.⁴ Tragically, this too has occurred in the church. Youth ministers must focus on youth! This is not to say that youth ministers do not need to know parents and siblings, intervene in cases of abuse, keep parents informed on the trends of youth culture, and help kids relate to their parents. Youth ministry in the coming years, however, must be marked by a renewed primary focus on the ministry needs of the adolescent. Youth ministry, then, is not about children, it is not about adults, and it is not about families. It is about youth—adolescents who are struggling to navigate that tumultuous transition between childhood and adulthood.

Evangelistic in Ministry?

Not only is youth ministry losing its focus on youth, it is also losing its focus as the historically evangelistic ministry through which it was birthed in the early 1900s. Five years ago, Youth Specialties' owner Mike Yaconelli suggested that youth ministers were not "social workers or counselors or social change agents or family therapists or family arbitrators or stepparents or activities coordinators or recreation directors or programmers or educators."⁵ While youth ministers certainly help kids relate to their families, engage in social services, counsel, program, and educate, youth ministry is primarily missional in nature. According to Yaconelli, the purpose of youth ministry can be summarized this way: "Youth ministry is about bringing kids into the presence of Jesus Christ."⁶

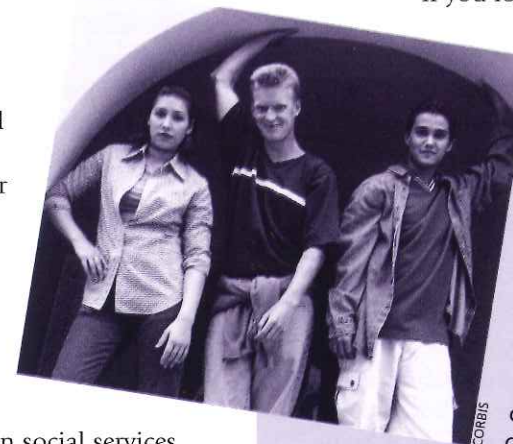
And which kids are we to bring into the presence of Jesus Christ? Kids who are *outside* of the presence of Jesus Christ, of course. Why, then, has youth ministry become so centered on nurturing the kids who are already *in* the presence of Christ? For the last few decades we have not taken Yaconelli's warning to heart and therefore find ourselves with an overwhelming proportion of contemporary youth ministries focusing on programming, promotion, and activities designed almost exclusively for those students who are already "in." Some would perhaps argue the point,

but we have done relatively well at keeping relatively satisfied those students who enjoy our programs. But most everyone would acknowledge that we have failed miserably at bringing disinterested or even irreligious kids who are far from God into the presence of Christ.

Historically, youth ministry has sought to be at least as missional as educational. "Tiger" McLuen, an executive director of youth leadership in Minneapolis, recently wrote that youth ministry must "shift from a Christian education focus to a missions focus. Our Christian education programs typically work to improve kids who are already in our sphere of influence. But our real job is to be missionaries to a world that's increasingly unchurched and un-Christian. We'll have little impact on the next generation of teenagers without a missions perspective permeating what we do."⁷

I invite those who are skeptical to complete this simple exercise. Gather a stack of theological dictionaries and books on the history and theology of Christian education. Now try to find "Youth Ministry" in these books. It will not be a major heading. Rather, youth ministry organizations, events, and leaders will be located under other major headings. But located where?

If you look under "Education" in the dictionaries, you will not find youth ministry. Oh, you will find the Sunday school



People like to be part of the middle class, preferably of the upper-middle class. One of the ways in which you achieve that goal is by working hard, by making long hours, by investing all your time and energy and insuring that you can buy a house that is in a neighborhood that you think is safe. As a consequence of all that, very little time is left over for emotions. It's almost like material aspects have begun running people's lives

One of the mistakes that all adults are prone to make is to provide adolescents with material goods, be it a special CD player, be it special clothes, whatever it is. And say, "This is my sign of love to you." And the adolescents are very happy with that. They'll take any kind of presents that you give 'em. What they don't tell you, because it's not cool to tell you as an adolescent, is, "I'd like a hug. I'd like to just sit next to you for five minutes and not talk about anything." If you talk with an 8- or 9-year-old, they'll snuggle up, they'll sit next to you, they still feel comfortable expressing those emotions. Once you are a teenager, you don't express it anymore, but you still need that. And somehow, by becoming so focused on where we are in terms of our class in society as adults, we forget that we then need to take the initiative to provide that kind of emotional support to our teenagers.

Claire Sterk, Professor, Emory University, on "Frontline," Public Broadcasting System

Most everyone would acknowledge that we have failed miserably at bringing disinterested or even irreligious kids who are far from God into the presence of Christ.

movement, the Christian school movement, vacation Bible school, and the Society for Christian Endeavor and its denominational clones. These are also the movements which comprise the history of the Christian education of youth. But these are not youth ministries. The Sunday school movement existed prior to the advent of adol-

It is my firm belief that the most important single thing we can do—as parents, teachers, and health professionals—is to reinvent our adulthood. . . . Children are the young of the species, and like the young of all species, they need adult guidance, direction, and protection.

David Elkind
Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance
(Harvard University Press, 1994)

escence. And even though Christian Endeavor and its clones ministered to adolescents, they were educational programs designed to nurture Christian kids of the church, not to reach those kids outside the church walls.

Now if you look in a theological dictionary under "Missions/Evangelism," you will find all of the youth ministry movements—from the Wood brothers' Young Life campaign in Great Britain and Jim Rayburn's Young Life USA to Lloyd Bryant's Christian Youth Campaign in New York City. From Evangelistic Radio Ministries and the Miracle Book Club to the Youth for Christ movement that began in Australia and spread throughout Canada before permeating the United States. In the history books, these youth ministry movements are usually relegated to the last chapter under "Parachurch Ministries" and have no place in the history of Christian education.

In other theological tomes, the same dichotomy is found as the theology of nurture is promoted in Christian education dating back to Horace Bushnell's theory that a "child is to grow up Christian and never know himself as being otherwise."⁸ It is only in the history of missiological revivals that you will find the youth ministry movements of the twentieth century recorded, and for good reason. Youth ministry grew out of revivalism and is historically based upon missional theology.

Youth ministry is a missional ministry whose objective it is to proclaim the gospel to a nation named Adolescence. And regardless of the strategy, the historical objective must remain. Pete Ward, a youth ministry leader in England, has described two approaches to youth ministry which he calls "outside-in" and "inside-out."⁹

The *outside-in* strategy focuses on reaching those young people who are especially distant from the church through radically penetrating the postmodern culture with committed youth leaders.

This strategy entails working far outside the church in the hope that some might be brought *inside*.

The *inside-out* strategy is equally committed to evangelism, but aims to reach young people who are less distant from the church, those who sit on the fringe of the church and can be reached through peer evangelism with a core group of Christian kids. This strategy uses young people *inside* the church to reach kids just *outside* on the fringe. The objective of both strategies is the same: Proclaim the gospel to a defined and targeted adolescent population, a nation named Adolescence.

Unfortunately, today there are too many youth ministries which do not even reach out to the kids on the fringe of the church, must less those who are clearly "outside." Christian young people inside the church walls are being nurtured (on some level, at least), but in most cases they are not reaching *outside*. According to the strategy mentioned above, when the inside-out approach loses its *out-ness* it is no longer youth ministry. Rather, it has become youth *education*. Christian education has generally been based upon a theology of nurture. And its component part, youth education, is vital to the discipleship process of young people within the fold. Youth *ministry*, however, has never been simply for those inside the church. It is also for those outside heaven's gate.

Both historically and theologically, youth ministry by definition is an evangelistic ministry to a specific culture of people who do not know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection. Walt Mueller, executive director of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, points to the future of youth ministry by challenging us to reclaim Jesus' incarnational model of the past: "I'm not talking about inventing anything new. I'm talking about recovering what was originally right."¹⁰

Sharing the Load

Many churches are killing their youth ministers, and youth ministers are killing themselves, because they perpetuate these historical dichotomies between evangelism and discipleship, Christian education of youth and youth ministry, and the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. But biblically, no such dichotomy actually exists.

Youth ministers seem to be doing more "babysitting" than ever before as churches implore them to keep church kids interested in church. And for those youth ministers and programs who reach out to lost, disinterested and/or unchurched kids before finishing the task of developing spiritual giants of all the church kids, the voices of discontent can quickly divide a church and even cost a youth minister his or her job. This can occur

simply by attempting to put into place strategies and methodologies that seek to care for the needs of those beyond the scope of traditional youth ministry.

I would like to make a radical suggestion: The spiritual formation of churched kids is *not* the responsibility of youth ministers—it is the responsibility of the adult members of the church. Perhaps next Sunday, the pastor could try this little experiment, by standing before the congregation and saying:

"Every so often in our worship service, we dedicate/baptize (depending on one's tradition) the children of our members. Each of you has witnessed many of the ceremonies. And each time you are asked as a congregation to answer this question: 'Will you, the congregation, commit to help raise this child in the ways of the Lord?' And each time you have in unison declared; 'We will.' I would like you at this time to write down the names of those young people in our church whom you have assisted in their spiritual journey over the last five years."

Chances are the congregation will be stunned. The vast majority will be unable to come up with even the name of one child to whom they made that commitment, let alone done anything for. What would happen if every church member that committed to help raise these children in the faith at their dedication or baptism actually followed through on that promise? I suspect that if only 10 percent of the congregation followed through in a meaningful way, the lives of our churched young people would be radically different. And, as a result, youth ministers would be free to focus on reaching the lost kids of the community who have no church family investing in them.

There is great irony here. Typically, we hire youth ministers, at great expense, to do a job that the church membership has already committed to do. We hire a professional to do a job that the family and the church family (the laity) are quite capable of doing. We should hire professional youth workers who will use their training and expertise to mobilize the church to reach out to adolescents who have no one to share the gospel with them. We must hire people to do only that which the average layperson *cannot* do—help the church penetrate the postmodern youth culture to reach irreligious kids with Jesus Christ. Today's kids long for ordinary adults who genuinely *care*. Every member of the Body of Christ has gifts and talents that can be used to both nurture kids who live within the church walls and to be available to those who do not.

A recent study of 2,400 Protestant youth ministers throughout the United States revealed some encouraging trends. Many youth ministers

today are between 30 and 39 years old, married with children, have been educated in the field of youth ministry in college or seminary, have served in youth ministry for at least seven years, and believe that they are called to youth ministry as a vocation, not a stepping-stone profession.¹¹ We in the church would do well to allow these gifted and committed youth ministers to fulfill the mission of the church that cannot be fulfilled by the average person in the pew.

The time has come to put an end to the historical dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship. We need to develop youth ministries in which congregations, under the supervision and training of youth ministers, take seriously their responsibility of nurturing those young people who would call themselves "disciples of Christ." Then we can release youth ministers to proclaim the gospel to a lost generation along with a team of youth evangelists, both adults and students who are gifted and passionate about sharing their faith with irreligious adolescents.

The heart and soul of youth ministry is to reach out to spiritually disinterested adolescents and invite them into a relationship with the God who came to seek and save the lost, Jesus Christ. To be faithful and effective in this mission, we must clearly understand the significant roles of the church, the family, and the youth minister in making genuine disciples of *all* the teenagers in this millennial generation who would have ears to hear.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark De Vries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (InterVarsity, 1994).
2. Chapman Clark, *Youthworker's Handbook on Family Ministry* (Zondervan, 1997).
3. Tony Campolo, *Growing Up in America* (Zondervan, 1989).
4. David Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go* (Addison Wesley, 1997).
5. Mike Yaconelli, "The Heart of Youth Ministry" [Video Series] (Zondervan, 1995).
6. Ibid.
7. Dennis "Tiger" McLuen, "A Missions Mindset: The Future of Youth Ministry," *Group* (Sept./Oct. 1998), 35-36.
8. Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Baker Books, 1861). See also a discussion of Bushnell in Kenneth Gangel's and Warren Benson's *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy* (Moody Press, 1983).
9. Pete Ward, *Youthwork and the Mission of God* (SPCK, 1997).
10. Walt Mueller, "Bridging the Gap," *Youthworker* (Jan./Feb. 1999), 33-42.
11. Karen Jones, "Refining the Image: A Vocational Perspective on Youth Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* (Fall 1999).



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Youth Ministry Around the World

BY PAUL BORTHWICK

We live in a multicultural, international, ever-shrinking world. The interdependencies of global economies, television by satellite, and electronic communications have created the "global village" that McLuhan predicted back in the sixties. But the ethnic "jihad" we see in the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda and elsewhere remind us that our world is far from cohesive.

In this world we seek to proclaim the gospel, but the world we enter is not the world of a few generations ago. In 1800, 86 percent of those who called themselves "Christian" were white. By this year, that number has dropped to 39 percent.¹ Christianity has become a non-Western religion. Somewhere between 1980 and 1982, a dramatic change occurred: For the first time since the earliest days of Christianity, the center of gravity for Christianity shifted from the Western Hemisphere to the Eastern Hemisphere and from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern.² According to Bryant Myers, "The center of gravity of the Christian church has moved to the Two-Thirds World where over 50 percent of today's Christians and 70 percent of today's evangelicals live."³

Facing this ever-shrinking, interdependent world, we are growing in our awareness of how this multicultural reality confronts us in youth ministry. Refugees, mass immigration, ethnic changes in our countries and our cities, and the shrinking influence of Western culture all alert us to the fact that reaching out to youth requires a multicultural sensitivity and wisdom. In the words of Mark Senter, "The day of the monolithic society for people 15 years old and younger is a thing of the past. Perhaps it never existed. The new paradigm of youth and children's ministry must be prepared to deal with the pluralism of the new generation."⁴

Looking at the state of youth ministry worldwide, we start by reasserting the global and eternal significance of youth ministry—so that our vision can be expanded to call on God for the wisdom we need to address the gospel to youth.

Global Significance

If we raise our eyes up to see beyond our own ministries and our own cultures, we will realize the global significance of youth ministry. Reaching adolescents for Christ is not just a Western

phenomenon, nor is it a white, middle-class phenomenon. Youth ministry is a *global* reality, a challenge bigger than anyone could have imagined back in the era when what we now see as traditional youth ministry laid its foundations.⁵

The Nexus program of Young Life, the Youth Desk of the World Council of Churches, the Youth Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, the student ministry of Campus Crusade, the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and Youth with a Mission, all serve to illustrate one thing: The world is young; and the mission of the church means dedicating ourselves to multifaceted ministry with the world's youth and children.

But our subjective involvement is built on objective facts. The sheer volume of young people in our world calls us to stand up and take notice of youth ministry as a cross-cultural, global challenge:

- This year, over half of our world is reported to be under age 25.⁶
- Currently, about one-third of the world (1.8 billion people) are under the age of 15, with 85 percent of these in the Two-Thirds World (in Africa, Asia, and Latin America).⁷
- In some countries of the Two-Thirds World, over 50 percent of the population is under 15.⁸
- Those in the Western countries are graying, and youth ministry as a priority may be called into question, [whereas] the non-Western world is getting younger and younger.

Eternal Significance

We approach youth ministry not only as sociologists and anthropologists, we evaluate the challenges as followers of Jesus Christ, who reminds us: "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37). Jesus, the voice of the voiceless, the champion of the underdog, who taught that "the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these," motivates our outreach to the young.

Our theological framework expands the way we see youth and youth ministry. Foundational to our thinking is the conviction of the eternal significance of youth ministry. Youth ministry ministers to those on the "hinge" years of life. The rest of their lives will swing on the decisions made during the adolescent years. Many make their personal decisions of faith in these adolescent years. In the

North American context, an estimated 85 percent of those who become Christians do so between the ages of 4 and 14.⁹

During the years we label now as "adolescence," young people formulate their worldviews, wrestle with their sense of personal purpose, determine lifestyle values, explore their sexuality, choose career direction and a marriage partner, and make choices regarding their personal faith.

Life direction and eternal destiny are on the line—at a time of life when many are ill-equipped to decide. Youth workers come alongside young people in these transitional years to offer the love and wisdom they need to make these choices.

Questions to Consider

The global and eternal significance of youth ministry presents us with a formidable task for which we often feel ill-equipped to offer answers. Addressing the inquiry, What is the state of youth ministry around the world? requires other questions pertaining to the global realities and multicultural challenges facing us in youth ministry.

Is there a "youth culture" that transcends cultural distinctives? Is there a "universal adolescent"?

In 1988 Daniel Offer and his associates, in *The Teenage World*,¹⁰ written from their study of adolescents in ten different countries—USA, Bangladesh, Hungary, Japan, Germany, Australia, Italy, Turkey, Israel, and Taiwan—introduced a concept called the "universal adolescent," a worldwide relationship of teenagers who have a similar "culture created by a variety of forces in the world."

The Teenage World postulated that media, music, dress, and other identifiers of youth culture are now creating a distinct youth culture to the point that youth in Hungary have more in common with youth in Australia than they have with the culture of their mothers and fathers. If these conclusions are correct, the implications for cross-cultural youth ministry are staggering. Rather than seeking to reach youth in individualized cultures, all we would need to do would be to identify the key entry points of the "universal adolescent" and address our ministry to these. One standardized, globalized methodology of youth ministry could be produced for use throughout the world.

Offer and his colleagues raise a fascinating possibility which any youth leader can anecdotally agree to by watching the response of teenagers in Romania to Michael Jackson or the lines of teenagers at McDonalds in Hong Kong or Moscow.

But the universal adolescent concept grossly oversimplifies our world. Its application may have validity with middle-class youth, but the vast number of youth who remain untouched by traditional youth ministry in our Western urban

centers or in the Two-Thirds World are economically poor. There may be aspects of youth culture affecting young people worldwide, but these are usually blended into a mix of traditions, culture, religion, and family values.

Youth ministry in the multicultural context cannot be reduced to oversimplifications and universal methodologies. Instead, the youth worker in the multicultural context must serve as a missionary, sociologist, and cultural anthropologist so that the ministry is presented in ways that are culturally sensitive and relevant.

What, if any, are the common issues facing youth and the youth worker across cultures?

Although the universal adolescent concept is doubtful, it is evident that youth—of all cultures and economic classes—are facing certain common challenges and influences. Most would agree that youth of the world are being media-influenced. The authors of *The Teenage World* write:

"Today's teenagers share both a collective personality and a collective consciousness. They watch airplanes in the sky above them, listen to the radio, and watch a rocket launched on TV. They think of these as everyday events. A 14-year-old in Bangladesh may watch the same television program as a 14-year-old in Germany, Israel, Turkey, or Taiwan. Media knows no borders; ideas and events are transmitted to all corners of the globe."¹¹

They may overstate the point when they observe that "Television may be functioning as a type of 'significant other' on a global level,"¹² but it is certain that the introduction of cable television and satellite dishes has intensified television's ability to spread a distorted image of life, especially in the West, as Vinodh Ramachandra observes:

"None of the American soap operas or sitcoms, for example, depict life in the decaying inner cities. The men are all wealthy, the women

For all their present and future importance, young people are not well served. Family systems, town and school systems, even national systems and churches can all benefit from the dreams and aspirations of youth—if they would only listen to what young people are feeling and saying!

Dean Borgman
When Kumbuya Is Not Enough (Hendrickson, 1997)

glamorous. Even the black families who appear are all living in the lap of luxury."¹³

One of the side effects of this media influence touches those in the poorest communities. In the summer of 1991, thousands of desperate Albanians (many of them young) commandeered boats to sail to Italy. "Apparently, one of the reasons for this exodus was that Albanians had been watching

Youth ministry ministers to those on the "hinge" years of life. The rest of their lives will swing on the decisions made during the adolescent years.

Reaching adolescents for Christ is not just a Western phenomenon, nor is it a white, middle-class phenomenon. Youth ministry is a global reality.

Although the universal adolescent concept is doubtful, it is evident that youth—of all cultures and economic classes—are facing certain common challenges and influences.

Italian television—including commercials for consumer goods, cat food being served on a silver platter, and the like.¹⁴ A distorted image of the West sent these watchers on a search for a world that does not exist.

Media influence links closely with music influence, an influence that caused the writers of *Time* to conclude that “America is saturating the world with its myths, its fantasies, its tunes and its dreams.”¹⁵ “Boris Yeltsin drew 110,000 people to his historic rallies that toppled the Marxist regime; days after the coup, however, the hard-rock bands Metallica and AC/DC drew 500,000.”¹⁶

Michael Keating observed the impact on one culture from the exportation of Western youth culture through music:

“I spoke recently with a young man from the South Pacific island group of Fiji. He told me that life there is not the same as it was a few short years ago. Fijian youth are increasingly rebellious and disrespectful to elders, the crime rate is soaring, the drug traffic booming. Why the change? After all, Fiji is quite remote. Television programming has only recently arrived on the islands. His answer: American music. It arrives there as soon as it arrives here, and it has captured the youth.

“What sort of life do these youth idols glorify? Animal sexuality, rebellion against all authority, violence of every kind, and party, party, party. Such a lifestyle works well for no one, least of all the rockers themselves, whose lives tend to be a mess of fear and frenzy. But the youth do not know that, and they think them glamorous and powerful instead of pitiable and despicable.”¹⁷

Music and the media closely align themselves with what we might simply call violence-influence. Many of the world's youth are growing up in abject poverty, urban violence, and in the face of war. A 1991 memo from the World Relief Commission's USA office cited 31 countries that were living in some state of war. In these countries, 42 percent of the population is under the age of 15.¹⁸

The violence glorified globally through the movies of filmstars such as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Steven Seagal permeates the hearts of young people feeling alienated from the world and purposeless in life.

The way out? Violence. Violence expresses the war raging within. Rape someone to show your superiority. Join a gang to find the family you never knew. Beat someone up to prove that you're not impotent. If you're feeling worthless, at least you can vindicate yourself by taking a few people out before you end your own life. This violence sinks deep into the lives of young people, especially those living in an urban-influenced world, a world that many traditional church youth

ministries never touch. Luis Bush of the AD 2000 movement writes:

“In the cities of the Two-Thirds World, more than 100 million children are growing up on the streets; they have no education, no affection, no adult guidance. Almost a million of them are forced into prostitution. In Bombay's 'red light' district, at least one-third of the prostitutes are little girls.”¹⁹

Leighton Ford observed that there is no Two-Thirds World city where the median age is greater than 20. In Mexico City, which some estimate will become the world's largest city by this year, the median age is 14.²⁰ If we are serious about the multicultural challenges facing youth ministry, we must turn our attention to the urban centers. “If the church fails in the city,” challenges missiologist Paul Hiebert, “it will become increasingly marginal in the world.”²¹

Although the direct realities of urban life may not be touching the ministries we currently serve, the realities of youth ministry in the world will include questions such as

- How do we minister to 800,000 girls under 16 working as prostitutes in Bangkok?²²
- What are the means of outreach to street kids being “terminated” in Rio de Janeiro by police?
- Who will reach the thousands of youth in the slums of São Paulo or Calcutta or Nairobi?

How, in the light of limited resources, can youth ministry become more holistic?

In my earliest days of youth ministry, the issues were basically sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll—and our message was: “Don't.” . . . Don't.” . . . and “Do so with moderation.” Youth ministry on a global scale is much more complicated than that. If youth ministry is dedicated to the development of the whole person—based on the holistic growth of Jesus in Luke 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom (intellectual), stature (physical), favor with God (spiritual) and favor with man” (social)—how will ministry respond to youth around the world?

- *Poverty and homelessness*—Of the 600 million people living in slums today, “74 percent are under the age of 24” and 100 million of these are estimated to be street kids.²³ Youth ministry in poor communities must include relief and development, lobbying the case of the poor before the powerful, and empowering the poor to break out of poverty.²⁴
- *Ministry among refugees*—the dispossessed. “Half of the world's 36 million refugees and displaced people are children.”²⁵
- *Joblessness or “underemployment”*—How does a holistic youth ministry respond? Literacy training? Job banks? Tutoring students? Providing job retraining?
- *Family breakdown*—renders students incapable

of pursuing healthy marriage and family decisions. A vacuum of positive role models, especially in the lives of “high risk” students, has resulted in diminished social skills.

- *AIDS and the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases*—What does youth ministry look like in Uganda, a “generation growing up with AIDS”? What does the gospel look like to 800,000 prostitutes in Bangkok, Thailand, or a village in Myanmar where 100 percent of the population is HIV positive?
- *Child slavery and the exploitation of youth as laborers, drug dealers, and prostitutes*—What is the role of youth ministry in offering alternatives to the desperate, or in empowering the powerless?

If we are serious about global youth ministry, we will need to work and pray and unite together to respond to these realities.

How do we bridge the gap between resources available and the needy youth of our world?

David Livermore cites that “The United States has 28 million teenagers making up less than 3 percent of the world's youth. Ninety-nine percent of the paid and volunteer youth workers in the world minister in the United States. Therefore, 99 percent of the world's youth workers minister to less than 3 percent of the world's teenagers.”²⁶

Whether or not the United States has 99 percent of the world's paid and volunteer youth workers is hard to validate, but Livermore's point—the unequal distribution of resources—is well taken, especially if we consider that most of the youth workers in the United States work with middle-class students of European descent in suburban areas. Few dedicate themselves to the multiethnic “urban war zones” where youth and children are a growing percentage of the total population. And how do we do this without translating everything that has been done in the West into other languages without regard for culture?

How will youth—in any culture—be incorporated into the church?

This question raises three corollary questions:

First, will existing church leaders see it as a priority to invest the church's resources in reaching out to and assimilating youth—especially when it is unlikely that these youth will actually ever become “cost-effective,” at least short-term?

Second, will church leaders recognize that youth represent the greatest *challenge* and the greatest *resource* facing the church worldwide?

- The greatest *challenge* because young people in every culture and all over the world are living in cultures or social settings or countries where the gospel has not penetrated. We need to recommit ourselves to looking for creative and

innovative ways to reach these youth with the love of Jesus Christ.

- The greatest *resource* because those young people who respond to the love of Christ can be subsequently disciplined and equipped to be part of the mobilized force that will complete Christ's Great Commission. In the history of modern missionary movements, young people have always been a major catalytic factor.

For this to occur, there must be a concerted effort of awareness-building done with church leaders. A worker in Bogota identified “conscientization” [literal translation from the Spanish] as the greatest challenge facing youth workers with other church leaders: to make them aware of the needs. This presents a special challenge in those cultures where youth are not venerated as they are in the West. (In many cultures, youth are expected to be “seen and not heard” out of respect for their elders. As a result, few church leaders in such cultures see youth work as a priority.)

Finally, will church leaders realize that getting youth from their own culture into church will be a cross-cultural experience? This is the point of Steve Flashman in *Closing the Gap*²⁷ and one of the points of Pete Ward's *Worship and Youth Culture*.²⁸

These writers strike at an unaddressed problem in most cultures: Youth feel that they neither belong nor are welcome in the adult culture called “church.” Whether or not they desire to follow Christ, they do not feel that church has any relevance to them. As a result, they often reject both the adult-culture church and Jesus together.

There are notable exceptions. On a recent visit to six countries in South America, I noticed how youth-oriented the worship services were. When I asked Jacobo Miranda Garcia, president of the Evangelical Council of Venezuela, what had caused the churches to respond this way, he replied, “We do not have a youth-orientation in our worship services. Most of our worshipers are youths, so the services naturally take on their energy. In Venezuela [and I imagine that this is true across South America], 66 percent of our evangelical worshipers are under the age of 25.”²⁹

Most of us, however, face two options: On one hand, we can build youth-dominated services and emphasize youth culture as the common denominator. In effect, we can start a new denomination specifically geared around young people and the culture that they bring with them. The inbred problem, of course, will be that these youth will grow older and will become the adult culture against which the next generation reacts.

On the other hand, we can try to maintain the cultural diversity and age-span representation of the Body of Christ by seeking to involve youth in the church *now*. Rather than seeing youth as the future of the church, they and their culture need to

Youth feel that they neither belong nor are welcome in the adult culture called “church.” . . . They do not feel that church has any relevance to them.

be incorporated in the present tense. As Melchor Go of the Philippines says, "Young people have the imagination; they can capture a vision very quickly. Young people dare to believe when faced with insurmountable problems. David, Joseph, Daniel and Mary were monumental examples to this fact."³⁰

What—if any—are the transcultural principles of youth ministry?

There are certainly common issues facing youth ministry around the world, whether or not there is a documentable *universal adolescent*. There are at least four commonalities which seem to be present in effective youth ministry across cultures.

Effective youth ministry is relationally driven. Programs, Bible studies, camps, and Sunday school-like activities serve the purposes of youth ministry around the world, but the principal driving force is *relationships*. The youth leader's relationships with students and their families determine the effectiveness of youth ministry—whether in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

Cultures which are more relationally driven (versus task-oriented)³¹ depend far less on programs and more on relationships. As a result, being with students becomes the most effective tool for evangelism, discipleship, and all other forms of ministry. A relational focus leads to the second common foundation in youth ministry.

Effective youth ministry is incarnational. The outreach of Operation Mobilization to the street youth in Montreal is built on the same foundation as the Christ for Greater Manila outreach to street youth in the Philippines. Youth Alive in Soweto, South Africa, derives its credibility from the same style of ministry as Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka or Young Life in the Czech Republic. In every case, effective youth ministry establishes credibility built on the same ministry style of Paul with the Thessalonians: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

Where youth leaders rely on programs and keep an emotional distance from students, youth ministry falters, but the effective youth ministries in every culture thrive as a result of loving, devoted youth leaders who imitate the example of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11 by leaving their own comforts and willingly entering the world of the student. Effective youth leaders in the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students enter the school environment. Successful and fruitful youth workers with Young Life worldwide seek to identify with the lifestyle and challenges of their club members. Church and parachurch youth leaders who break into the youth world do so by seeking to "become Christ" to the students whose

lives they are seeking to touch.

Ajith Fernando of Youth for Christ addressed this in the Youth Track at the 1989 Lausanne II Conference in Manila:

"Many participants in Lausanne II came to realize that young people need human leaders like Jesus who can be role models for them. They need someone to teach them how to show unselfish, loving, and creative concern for those less fortunate than themselves. Young people need loving, kind, and gentle leaders who can understand their deepest longings, and yet guide them into a radical community stripped of race and class barriers. A bewildered and fractured generation is searching for meaning in life."³²

This incarnational principle naturally leads to the third: *Effective youth ministry is holistic*. Youth ministry in the United States, for the last 30 years or more, been built on a suburban, middle-class assumption of ministry style. As a result, our youth ministries build on programs, the dissemination of knowledge, and a concentration on experiences to promote growth. Only recently have we begun to realize that some of these assumptions are virtually irrelevant in other contexts—most notably (in the United States) with the urban poor.

The urban youth worker in North America and the international youth worker actually share in the realization that youth ministry, to be incarnational, must also be holistic. Family intervention, tutoring programs, drug rehabilitation, and job training characterize effective youth ministries around the world:

- In South Africa and Northern Ireland, youth ministers lead their youth by training them concerning reconciliation.
- In South America, youth ministry includes literacy training for the educationally disadvantaged and job provision for unemployed youth.
- In Asia, youth ministry programs address the problems of newfound wealth and materialism.

Around the world, youth leaders speak to us like the Apostle James: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). Bible study and health care go hand-in-hand. Prayer times and community clean-up projects serve together to build the faithful. Witnessing takes place in proclamation and in demonstration.

Relationships, incarnational styles, and holistic ministry combine to produce the fourth principle: *Effective youth workers serve as agents of hope*. Any review of the literature covering youth in almost any culture will consistently confront the word "hopelessness." Waldo Neufeld, a worker with the Mennonite Central Committee's program on AIDS education in British Columbia started asking

young people why there was so much promiscuous behavior going on even when teens were aware of the dangers of AIDS. He writes, "I was told there is such a high level of hopelessness, they really don't care; they feel there's nothing for them in the future."³³

David Patty of Malachi Ministries in Eastern Europe examined the youth of Hungary, Poland, Romania, the former Soviet Union, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. He arrived at the conclusion that most youth are facing a hopeless future—with unemployment, unrealized dreams about freedom, violence in the streets, and widespread dissatisfaction—leading to increased suicide rates and a host of other side-effects of hopelessness.³⁴

In the roughest section of the city of Boston, an urban youth worker related a conversation he had with an 18-year-old who was experimenting with crack cocaine. He rebuked the young man: "Don't you realize that crack cocaine can kill you?" the youth worker asked. The young man looked at him blankly, "Yeah, so?"

In contrast to this despair comes the church of Jesus Christ. As Lesslie Newbigin, a veteran missionary to India writes, "The distinguishing mark of this Christian community will be hope."³⁵

Through relationships, love of students, and a willingness to imitate Christ by coming into the world of those we're trying to reach, we come as agents of hope—God's hope. Hope of forgiveness. Hope that I can change, that you can change, that our world can change by the power of the gospel.

Vincent Donovan, a missionary to the Masai people of East Africa, wrote:

"There is no future tense in the Masai language. . . . I think you could say that one of the purposes and goals of evangelizing the Masai is to put a future tense in their language."³⁶

This is our challenge across cultures and countries in reaching youth: to give them a future tense, a hope, a sense of future, a sense that life has meaning and purpose and is worth living. In the face of violence and unemployment and challenges and fear, the voice of God rings forth through those dedicated to love young people and exemplify the optimism of faith: "For I know the plans I have for you. Plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

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Organizing Your Youth Ministry (Zondervan, 1988); *How to Choose a Youth Pastor* (Nelson, 1993); and *Youth and Missions* (Youth Specialties, 1998).

Church and
parachurch
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I'm the Minister to Youth and Their Families—Now What?

BY MARK DE VRIES

When I moved to Nashville almost 14 years ago, my new position came with a curious title: "associate minister to youth and their families." "I like it," I said to the senior minister. But underneath my agreement, I wondered, How in the world am I supposed to do that?

We knew we wanted to build a youth ministry that went beyond the traditional programming that isolates kids from adults. We determined to build a strategy that focused first on undergirding the entire youth program with proactive Christian parents and a well-stocked cheering (and praying) section of mature Christian adults in the church. The emphasis was not on creating a different program but a different foundation.

Over the years, I've heard my fair share of objections to building "family-based youth ministry"—from lack of time, to lack of expertise, to simply not wanting to deal with troublesome parents. There are many voices against and barriers to making the move from "traditional" youth ministry to a ministry that is "family-based," but the benefits far outweigh the objections.

Family-Based Ministry

The message I try to give youth ministers is not that they need to abandon what they are doing, but that before they focus on programming, the first priority should be to ensure that a solid foundation for long-term, community, and family support is in place. As a matter of fact, if a church is considering asking its already-strung-out youth director to take on the additional ministry of working with the families of young people, my

advice is: Don't do it! Adding "ministry to families of teenagers" to a youth leader's job description will drastically complicate his or her work. This kind of ministry is much too complex and much too important to be placed as number 53 on the "To Do" list of a harried youth leader.

I intentionally called my book on families in youth ministry *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. Parents of youth can be a marvelous foundation for youth ministry. But family ministry is a lousy appendage to youth ministry. I am no handyman expert, but I know that if I use foundation materials (like tons of concrete) on my roof, my house will cave in. To lay responsibility for family ministry on top of the other things a youth minister is required to do is a prescription for disaster.

If, on the other hand, a church is committed to building a lasting ministry to teenagers, I can think of no foundation (other than Jesus Christ, of course) that compares to the undergirding strength and power of parents and the extended family of other adults in the church. Three long-term benefits of this kind of ministry are immediately clear:

Benefit 1: Getting beyond the reinventing-the-wheel-revolving-door youth ministry syndrome

It has become standard operating procedure for churches to go through youth ministers like disposable diapers. In informal discussions with church leaders about their youth programs, I hear over and over again, "We are in a rebuilding stage. After our last youth pastor left, we have struggled . . ."

Churches get trapped in the revolving-door syndrome when they make the youth leader the lynchpin for the entire youth ministry, forgetting that no one has as big a stake in the junior highers than their parents. Not long ago, a mother came to me with an idea for our junior high program. The mother was nervous. Apparently, in her previous church, the youth pastor had historically stonewalled her ideas. After she told me her idea, I asked if she would spearhead an effort to make it a reality. She pulled together ten other parents and put on a fine event. All it cost me was an hour for lunch (she even paid), and it saved me the untold hours it would have taken me to pull off the event myself.

Benefit 2: Exposing teenagers to the most important sources of long-lasting faith development—parents and an extended family of mature Christian adults

Most youth workers know by experience how powerful (for good or for evil) a parent's influence can be. For a young person to make it to maturity as a Christian, he or she needs a cloud of witnesses, not a mass production system. Our traditional youth programs focus so strongly on establishing "community" among youth that our kids are typically robbed of the opportunity to get to know real live adults who are living out their faith without the benefit of a youth group.

Benefit 3: Providing a lasting extended Christian family for kids who don't come from Christian homes

One of the strangest objections to family-based youth ministry has been that it leaves out the kids who don't come from Christian homes. In reality, it's the traditional youth ministers that are most prone to "orphan" kids. They carry young people until they graduate from the youth group, then leave them with limited ties to the world of Christian adults. Family-based youth ministry, on the other hand, seeks to provide an extended Christian family of other adults in the church (i.e., Christian parents on loan) for those kids who don't have Christian parents of their own.

"But how?" you say. "We need a compass!" If you are like most people who hear these ideas for the first time, you probably have just one question on your mind: "Okay, youth ministry expert, if the way we've always done youth ministry doesn't work anymore, where do we start?"

First, the bad news: I've tried enough of the "quick and easy steps to an effective ministry" to know that youth ministry has never been anything like "quick" or "easy." But here's the good news: Though I have no foolproof road map, I do have a compass. And I can tell you some of the essentials you'll need:

Basics for Success

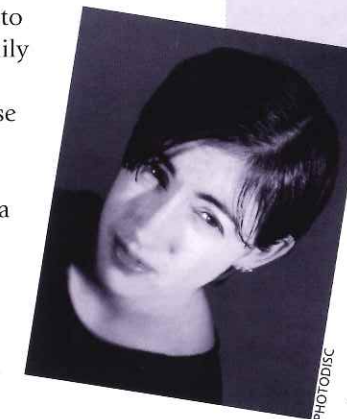
- **Establish a dream team** that is committed to the idea of family-based youth ministry. But don't expect it to be established in the next six weeks. This kind of ministry typically does not begin with a single, explosive, high-profile visibility. A compelling momentum (with adults and youth together) can often be a result, but it is seldom the starting point. Creating a dream team may

be easier than you think. You can begin simply by asking people to pray about family-based youth ministry, sharing books and articles that can help the group begin thinking in new ways. Listen to a wide variety of voices to be sure that there is enough consensus behind a change to give you the freedom to move forward.

- **Try something new.** Once a team is in place, ask them to help you pull off a single, parent/youth

Theologically, few would argue with the idea that youth ministry is an important mandate of the church, regardless of how it is defined. Ecclesiologically, however, youth ministry has become in many cases a praxiological nightmare; for in a wildly changing culture, the church is hard-pressed to address such a dynamic force as youth culture. The vast majority of churches want a vibrant youth ministry, but the bulk of them want to create and sustain a "healthy" youth ministry out of pragmatic need rather than theological and ecclesiological conviction. This is the paradoxical quandary of contemporary youth ministry—churches are screaming for youth ministry (and an "excellent" youth ministry at that, read high-powered, entertaining, and theologically/sociologically "safe"), but there are few pastors, staffs, and even boards who are convinced that God has called them as a church to mobilize their resources in order to penetrate a distant and disruptive generation.

Chapman R. Clark
"The Missional Approach to Youth Ministry"
in *Four Views of Youth Ministry*, Mark Senter, Editor
(Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2001)



event. It could be a special Sunday school class, a dinner with a speaker, a picnic. The great news with this first event is that even if it is less than successful (this is still youth ministry, remember), the dream team can then get back together to determine what will work in your setting. Keep returning to the compass, and the course will become clear.

- **Go slowly.** As I have watched groups all over the country try to implement this type of ministry, I have become convinced that family-based youth ministry will not work like a microwave—it's not fast and it's not particularly hot (at least initially). Churches all around the country are beginning bold experiments to bring parents into the mainstream of youth ministry. Things will not likely be neat and tidy. But the long-term impact on the faith of our teenagers will be well worth the mess.

Foundational Principles

With many fits and starts, over the years I have developed two foundational principles that have guided my work with teenagers and their parents:

It has become standard operating procedure for churches to go through youth ministers like disposable diapers.

If the way we've always done youth ministry doesn't work anymore, where do we start?

In my view, two massive sets of social and economic changes have occurred along parallel tracks, and they intersect most acutely at the point where young people attempt to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. . . . I see these two tracks as the following: a significant increase in the level and number of skills needed for successful adulthood, and a significant decrease in the ongoing support and guidance offered young people during their growing years. These two trends have created a serious problem in our country, indeed a crisis.

James Comer, Yale Psychiatrist,
Report from 1992 Carnegie Corporation's Commission on
Youth Development and Community Programs

- *Find ways to empower parents.* First, I have focused on finding ways to empower parents to provide intentionally for the Christian nurture of their children. "Faithful Families" parenting courses, vision-sharing meetings with parents at the beginning of the year, and periodic parents' newsletters are all ideas that helped us move toward this goal.

Youth ministry may function as a loving body within its segmented community, but by the very nature of institutional compartmentalization in the church, it is very difficult for adolescents and adults to know one another, much less care about each other. The greatest tragedy of the nature of contemporary youth ministry is the almost complete lack of relationship between the church at large and the young people.

Chapman R. Clark
*"Fragmentation to Integration:
 A Theology for Contemporary Youth Ministry"*
American Baptist Journal (Spring, 2000)

The youth minister cannot afford to be like the officer who ran so far ahead of his troops that they mistook him for the enemy and shot him.

- *Broaden the idea of "family."* The second foundational principle has been to broaden the idea of what "family" means in the church. Our goal is to provide multiple settings in which kids can make connections with their extended family of mature Christian adults in the church. Matching each youth an adult prayer partner, providing annual parent-youth Sunday school classes, and developing an annual parent/youth kick-off celebration have all become central strategies of what we have grown to call "family-based youth ministry."

An "Expert's" Transition

I enjoyed my years as an "expert" on teenagers. When parents came to me for counsel or the church leaders looked to me for advice, it was nice to have the detachment and authority that being an *expert* brings. But with a growing youth ministry staff and increasing responsibilities in other areas, it had been, in the pointed words of the little girl in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, "a long time since I smelled the inside of a real school bus."

But all that changed a few years ago when my

son joined the junior high group. Now that I'm a parent of a junior higher, I can't help but see youth ministry through radically different lenses. I realize now that what I want my son to gain from our youth ministry is exactly what parents of junior highs I have worked with for years have wanted. I don't want another program to fill up my son's calendar or another place for him to be isolated from "interfering adults." In fact, I've come to believe that youth ministries that habitually separate kids from parent-types may actually be more a part of problem than the solution.

But, some might argue, youth directors simply don't have time to work with the families of youth. It's true that between the "Banana Bash" and the junior high girl who's chronically in crisis, little time is left to add anything else. There is little debate today about the power of parents in the formation of their children's faith. Certainly, there are studies and statistics aplenty to make this case, but I check out this theory periodically when I lead Family-Based Youth Ministry seminars around the country. Typically, I ask groups of Christian youth leaders, "How many of you came from homes in which there was at least one Christian parent?" I have yet to meet a group in which more than five percent of the group came from non-Christian homes.

In this new model, the youth minister cannot afford to be like the officer who ran so far ahead of his troops that they mistook him for the enemy and shot him. Our kids, parents, boards, and churches do not need another messiah. They need a community of Christian adults who are willing to be instruments of the only true Messiah.



MARK DE VRIES, (M.Div.), an ordained Presbyterian Church U.S.A. minister, is now serving his fourteenth year of youth ministry at the First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. As a seasoned youth pastor of 21 years' experience, he is frequently asked to teach seminars on successful youth ministry and to

speak on his noted book *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (InterVarsity, 1994).

Playing as a Team

BY KARA ECKMANN POWELL

As long as I can remember I've loved football. When I was 12 years old, my brother, two neighbor kids, and I formed "AFAS," short for "Alley Football All-Stars." We had plays we had practiced, we had cheers we had worked out, and when it came to game time, we scored touchdown after touchdown against the other kids in the neighborhood. That is, until Mom called us in for dinner.

But even when no other teammates were around, I still loved to play. I'd hike the ball to myself, take a few steps back, throw the football high into the air, try to catch it, and then run as fast as I could for the crack in the sidewalk that marked the end zone, dodging imaginary defenders. I didn't even have to have a real ball. I was a one-woman team. And I played with gusto.

As I scan the current youth ministry horizon, I don't think I'm alone in pretending to be a one-person team. Far too many youth workers I know do it every week. They are dedicated men and women, rookies and veterans, church and parachurch workers, working diligently to make sure their youth group is welcoming, encouraging, and inspiring. Some are very good at it, but they are often tired individual players, on the verge of injury and near defeat.

My aim is to identify and explore the metaphor of a youth group community as a team. To maintain a balance between sociology, theology, and practical ministry, I will use a three-step methodology that raises critical investigative questions, engages in theological reflection, and suggests a renewed paradigm.

Fundamental to this investigation of youth group community is the belief in "theory-laden practices." According to Don Browning, widely recognized in the field of practical theology, a *theory-laden practice* is an act or behavior that emerges from a principle or set of principles, however subconsciously these principles may be held.¹ Most and, quite possibly, all practices reflect beliefs and theories, and most, if not all, theories overflow into practices.²

The Critical Question

Why do you think your students are coming to your youth group? If you answer that they walk in and decide to stay because of the relationships and

friendships they've developed in your youth group, research suggests you are largely correct. In a 1998 random national telephone survey of 600 teenagers, 70 percent responded positively when asked if they attended a church youth group weekly or even occasionally. The second most important reason these students gave for their attendance was "relationships" or "friendships."³

These are good reasons for attending a church youth group, but they could just as likely be given to explain attendance at a soccer practice or student government meeting, or any other of a wide range of student gatherings. While the nature of adolescent intellectual and socio-emotional development leads one to expect a common set of reasons for students' attendance at any club or meeting, I would also hope that the encounter with God at a youth group would be substantively different from any other meeting. Furthermore, it is unclear if the reasons students come to a youth group match the biblical picture of *why* they should come. Thus it may be helpful to ask: What are some purposes for a youth group meeting that may be missing from students' current understanding of their youth group involvement?

The Role of the Youth Pastor

The multiple vocational roles associated with the pastorate have been widely and repeatedly documented.⁴ An empirical survey examining the more narrow category of the youth pastor reveals eleven vocational roles, including that of administrator, educator/enabler, recreator/activities director, counselor, and pastoral worship leader.⁵

In the midst of the multiple roles expected and sometimes demanded of youth workers, it's possible that some roles are more important and maybe more biblically supported than others. Thus the critical question becomes: What is the purpose and role of adult leaders in a youth group community?

The Role of the Student Leader

Many youth ministries describe their attendees as advancing through a sort of progression. While expressed in various diagrammatic models,—ranging from a bullseye to a pyramid to a funnel—the progression remains fairly constant: from

The mission for every youth group is clear: to see lives changed by Christ in order to change the world.

The primary purpose for gathering is so people will walk out a little—or a lot—different than when they walked in.

casual attendees, to more committed attendees, to influencers in the ministry. The message that is often implicitly, or even explicitly, communicated in these diagrams and practices is that there are two different kinds of students: "guests" and "hosts." What is often assumed is that the guests are the less mature and skilled who *receive* ministry; in contrast, the hosts are the more mature and skilled influencers who *give* ministry. Often the latter are called "student leaders" or "student ministers."⁶

While there is almost certainly a continuum of spiritual, psychological, and socio-emotional maturity among adolescents, the underlying theory seems to be that some students are willing, or possibly even able, to minister and others are not. Thus an important question is: What is the purpose and role of a student leader, and how is that different than the rest of the students?

Theological Reflections

While keeping in mind the backdrop of the whole of Scripture, I intentionally focus on the Pauline epistles for two reasons: First, Paul, while being a theologian, maintained a strong sociological thrust by paying attention to the social attitudes and structures of his day, even adopting them at times.⁷ Second, far from being cloistered in isolated theological reflection, Paul was actively engaged in understanding and responding to the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures that blanketed the Mediterranean region. Following the practical methodology

Testament, 60 of these by Paul, *ekklesia*, while commonly translated as "church" in Scripture, is generally defined in the Greek language as "assembly."¹⁰ Most often these assemblies were held in private homes.¹¹ Not once does Paul employ the term to describe a building, for church buildings did not exist until the third century. Rather, he consistently uses it to describe the gathered believers.

For today's youth group, a baffling element in Paul's description of the purpose of this assembly is not so much what he teaches, but what he does not teach. Paul does not label the primary purpose of the gathered community as teaching or learning. Neither does he describe it as worship.¹² Rather, for Paul, worship is a consuming lifestyle of obedience that can be experienced both corporately and individually at any time and in any location.¹³ Furthermore, Paul never defines the assembly's mission as evangelism and/or social action. Although important to his theology, dispersing the gospel and serving others can also occur outside of the gathered church.¹⁴ Of course, teaching, worship, evangelism, and social action can and do happen when a community gathers, but they are either precursors of consequences of a greater purpose—the strengthening of the church.¹⁵

What is the purpose and role of adult leaders in a youth group community?

Because of the transformative power residing in the spiritual gifts of community members, ministry in the community should be by the community and to the community. In Ephesians 4, as Paul leads up to his description of community ministry and spiritual maturity, he gives a blueprint to help adult leaders build a serving community. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul describes the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers as those who "prepare God's people for works of service." Note that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers do not do the works of service themselves. They support others as they do the work of the ministry.

What is the purpose and role of a student leader, and how is that different than the rest of the students?

Although all members are gifted, it is almost inevitable that some members become more visible within the community, either because of their gifts or because of their personalities. However, the uniqueness of students with these gifts is in the visibility and scope of their gifts, not in the fact that they possess gifts. It is theolog-

ically incorrect to treat and even label only a portion of Christian students in a youth group as "ministers." Every follower of Jesus Christ is a minister.

A Renewed Paradigm

Many youth workers have discovered at least some of these conclusions in books and seminars, or in their own study of Scripture—and maybe even taught them in their own classrooms or youth meetings. Despite this, youth groups that let theories permeate their actual practices seem to be the exception, not the rule. It may be that these theories have not been translated into concrete behaviors because youth workers find it difficult to break through the dominant stereotype of the strong and gifted leader who remains the driving force of his or her youth group. Even if he or she believes that the purpose of the youth group meeting is to strengthen the youth (and, ultimately, the larger adult) community, that the role of adult leaders should be one of preparing students for ministry, and that every student is gifted for ministry in some fashion, youth workers may have difficulty finding models of the application of these theories. Without such examples, it is difficult to apply these theories in actual practice.

Whatever the obstacle, the final step is to map out a renewed paradigm for youth group community that I call a "mutually ministering community." In order to make this model understandable in today's context, I will use the image of the football team. In order to make it transferable, I will briefly highlight both guiding principles and concrete practices that can potentially be copied or adapted to fit youth groups in a variety of settings.

Keep in focus what you want to have accomplished when the game ends.

All football team players and coaches know exactly what they want to have accomplished when the whistle blows at the end of the game. They want to have scored more points than the other team. Their ultimate mission could not be more clear.

In alliance with Paul's doctrine, the mission for every youth group is equally clear: to see lives changed by Christ in order to change the world. The mission of a youth group is not to grow bigger, to have fun, or to welcome others, although youth workers (and sometimes students) desire these. The primary purpose for gathering is so people will walk out a little—or a lot—different than when they walked in.

Youth workers who recognize this must take advantage of the variety of opportunities they

have to share it as they stand in front of students in their youth groups, meet with parents, and share proposals with the church board. This will make not only the youth worker and the youth group, but also the church and its leadership, more likely to look beyond the more superficial gauges of youth group attendance, budget, and staff size to the ultimate standard for evaluation: life transformation.

Only do what helps you win the game.

No football team would run drills and execute plays that weren't designed to help them reach their end goal of winning the game. If passing the ball isn't working, a wise team adjusts and runs with it instead.

When certain elements of a youth group aren't bringing about life transformation, they should probably be eliminated, at least temporarily. Whether it's because what used to be provocative has been so often repeated it is now mundane, or because this year's seniors aren't like last year's, even previously effective practices of a youth group can become impotent.

However, a wise youth worker recognizes the subtle but surprising influence that some youth group elements have in forming students'—especially young adolescents'—image of God. For instance, the crowd-breaker you play will probably teach more about the wild adventure of following God than your well-planned talk. The greeting students receive when they step into the youth group may say more about God's love than memorizing 1 Corinthians 13.¹⁶

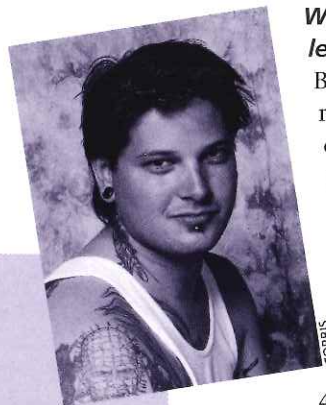
Eliminate the stands.

Like many youth groups, a football game is comprised of a few players on the field who desperately need rest and a crowd of people in the stands who desperately need exercise.

Instead of viewing themselves, their adult leaders, and at some level the entire adult congregation, as a hard-working team playing in front of the rest of the spectating students, youth workers in a mutually ministering community "eliminate the stands" and set up a series of adjacent practice fields instead. In other words, they do everything they can to convert guests into hosts, and spectators into players. It might mean they change their seating arrangement so that students are seated eye to eye instead of shoulder to shoulder. Or it might mean that they change their terminology, referring to all of their students as "ministers." Perhaps if they're involved in a larger youth group, they might choose to model their ministry after the early church and regularly divide into smaller groups that allow for more interaction and discussion. The overriding goal shifts from entertainment to active participation.

The most stunning change for adolescents today is their aloneness. The adolescents of the nineties [were] more isolated and more unsupervised than other generations. It used to be that kids sneaked time away from adults. . . . Today, Mom is at work. Neighbors are often strangers. Relatives live in distant places. This changes everything.

Patricia Hersch
A Tribe Apart (Columbine, 1998)



explained earlier in this article, Paul allowed these cultural issues, as well as the problems and questions of specific communities, to direct his creative energy and the topics of his letters.⁸

What are some purposes for a youth group meeting that may be missing from students' current understanding of their youth group involvement?

The nature of the church community can be partially understood from Paul's use of the term *ekklesia*.⁹ Used over 100 times in the New

When certain elements of a youth group aren't bringing about life transformation, they should probably be eliminated, at least temporarily.

Remember that lots of seasoned coaches are needed.

Although every football team has a head coach, no head coach can supervise all the players, nor can he develop and maintain expertise in all positions. As a result, most teams have additional specialized coaches to give focused attention to the defense, the offense, and the special teams.

No youth pastor can or should be expected to develop and maintain mastery in all the spiritual gifts. It is a theological and anthropological impossibility. But all youth pastors, regardless of the size of their church or ministry, can and should be expected to recruit other adults to help them in their coaching, especially in their weaker areas. An insightful youth pastor who excels in evangelism will seek out help in areas of pastoring and teaching to ensure ongoing spiritual formation. Similarly, a youth minister who has the gift of teaching should intentionally pursue fellow coaches who have gifts of service and giving in order to make sure students experience God not only in their heads, but with their hands. Some of these fellow coaches may be "long distance mentors" who inspire and guide through E-mail, phone calls, or letters.

Figure out the best position for each player.

A good coach never assumes that the positions his players currently occupy are optimal. Instead, he or she constantly assesses, experiments, substitutes, and improvises with the players, helping them discover their ideal role on the team.

In a youth group, the youth minister, adult leadership team, small-group leaders, students, student leaders, and students' parents all need help in deciphering their ministry gifts and positions. Three common methods of helping people identify their gifts are personal reflection, spiritual-gift inventories, and input from others. It is best to use a combination of all three methods because personal reflection can be distorted, spiritual-gift inventories can be impersonal, and input from others can be biased.

When the ball gets fumbled, all grab for it.

While a football team will only be successful if the center does his job and hikes the ball to the quarterback, who in turn does what he is supposed to and throws the ball to the wide receiver, who does what is intended and catches the ball—when the ball is fumbled, everything changes. The center, quarterback, wide receiver, and linemen alike all scramble to grab that ball.

Similarly, as youth workers help their students understand and move out in their spiritual gifting, they must be on guard against lopsided spirituality. Most (potentially all) of the spiritual gifts are also practices of discipline and obedience that are

universally expected of every believer. While believers excel in their specific areas of gifting, all should be able to "play the positions" of showing mercy, giving, serving, sharing their faith, teaching, praying, having faith, and exhorting others. That way, when something unexpected happens, the body remains balanced and productive.

It seems appropriate when referring to football to quote the most winning NFL coach of all time, Vince Lombardi.¹⁷ According to Lombardi, "Any man's finest hour—his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear—is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause, and he's exhausted on the field of battle."¹⁸ What Lombardi realized is that playing a game, whether it be professional football or youth ministry, can be simultaneously draining and exhilarating. What he missed is that a person's finest hour is not when he or she has worked his or her heart out for a good cause, but when that person has been part of a team that has the best cause—an eternal cause.

ENDNOTES

1. Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Fortress, 1991), 6.
2. Because of the lack of research on youth ministry, it is difficult to ascertain the exact principles that drive some of the behaviors of youth groups. However, I suggest some theories from recent research and from my own observations.
3. George Barna, 1998.
4. George Barna, *Today's Pastors* (Regal Books, 1993), 130; Samuel W. Blizard, "The Minister's Dilemma," *Christian Century* (April 25, 1956), 508-510.
5. Martha Jean Woody Minardi, "The Role(s) of the Minister of Youth" (Ed.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Seminary, 1987), 67-68.
6. Joe Brown, "Do You Believe Your Students Have Spiritual Gifts? Are You Sure?" (Talbot School of Theology, July 31, 1998), 2.
7. 1 Cor. 9:19-23.
8. Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Hendrickson, 1994), 4-6.
9. While some might assume that Paul's use of the term *koinonia*, or "fellowship," is equally important, Paul more often uses it to refer to fellowship with Christ.
10. Banks, 1994, 27; Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III (Eerdmans, 1965), 503.
11. Acts 2:46; Acts 12:12; Rom. 16:3-5; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2.
12. Maurice Goguel's claim that the church is assembled for worship seems to be a flawed exegesis of the passage reports Maurice Goguel in *The Primitive Church* (Allen and Unwin, 1964), 52.
13. Rom. 12:1-2.
14. Banks, 1994, 89.
15. 1 Cor. 14:12-26; Eph. 4:11-13.
16. Kara Eckmann Powell, "What Lurks Behind Those Fish, Toilet Paper, and Pantyhose Games?" *Youthworker Journal*, XVI, 1 (Sept./Oct. 1999), 21.
17. Lombardi's career coaching record was 105-35-6.
18. Web site for South End Zone, Packers Coaches, Lombardi, Quotes.



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An Open Letter to Youth Leaders

BY CHRISTINA JACOBSON AND JOCELYN SHERMAN

The following letter was written by two self-described "alternative-type" female students. It is a glance at the diversity of students that a youth leader is called upon to minister to. But, as has been stated, youth ministry is not simply about a professional minister and a few adult sponsors. Rather, it is a focused commitment of an entire congregation to care for a unique subculture. This, then, is one snapshot of what the church is called to deal with as a body. (Two late-adolescent men could have written similar letters containing identical longings: "Take us seriously; understand our need to be unique; give us a bit of personalized attention; find places for us to connect with others.")

Christina and Jocelyn may not see themselves as "typical," but in so many ways they are typical—just like every person created in God's image is typical. As pastors and youth leaders read these letters, we hope they will consider those students from their church who might feel disconnected or unwelcome—and then ponder for a minute on those students outside the church fellowship who need their love. Perhaps the hurts expressed by these young women will spark a desire to care for all the kids that God calls his own.

Dear Youth Leaders,

We are female college students who used to attend your youth groups. We have been asked to share some insights and reflections from our experience in church when we were teenagers. First, we are pleased to see that many of today's youth leaders have successfully developed a ministry strategy largely aimed at the mainstream junior high and high school kids. We believe, however, that it appears that the needs of many teenagers and, more specifically, "alternative-type" kids, are not being sufficiently addressed by some churches. Perhaps this is because today's teenagers are often misjudged, or at least misunderstood, just as we were when we were that age. We share our stories here and make a few suggestions that may help make your ministry more effective to this particular age-group.

Jocelyn's Story

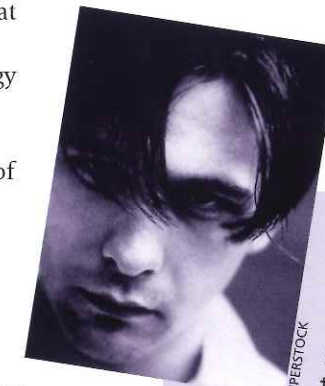
"Typical" has never been a word I would use to describe myself. This was especially true in high

school. Wearing bell-bottoms, thrift store finds, and baggy pants didn't make me typically fashionable at the time. But the last thing I wanted to be was *typical*, because to me, typical meant *mediocre*. I don't know exactly what my parents thought about my "differentness," but this concern, added to the fact that I had few Christian friends, may have been what sparked my mother's frequent suggestions that I start going to the youth group at our church. I didn't particularly object to going and didn't suffer any aversion to the experience—but there also wasn't anything that gave me an overwhelming desire to return the next week. Actually, my first thought was: "What does 'Broomball' have to do with God?"

The people there, both leaders and students, were nice enough. But no one looked like I did, knew about the things I was interested in, or seemed to have much in common with me. The kids were friendly to me and I to them, but I knew we wouldn't talk to each other during passing period at school on Monday. Those kids reminded me of the popular clique at school and, in my opinion, *popular* equaled *typical* equaled *mediocre*. This feeling of being different (and taking pride in that difference) was the first reason why that youth group didn't appeal to me.

The second reason, somewhat related to the first, was that I didn't feel like I'd ever really become integrated into the group.

Not only did I look and think differently, I also acted differently. I didn't act like I needed any help or any attention



To the average churchgoer, today's young people may seem frightening. Looking across the sociological moat from the safety and comfort of our ecclesiastical castles, the church is surrounded by seemingly sinister forces that seek to undo whatever good has been done in the name of the church. Popular culture, technology, tattoos and piercings, angry music, and insolent expressions are the "culprits" that many inside the walls of the church believe will severely affect every "good person" and, especially, their own young people. These "outsiders," then, are people to be avoided.

Chapman R. Clark
*"An Ecclesiological Perspective of Youth Ministry:
 Creating a Place for a New Generation"*
Christian Education Journal (in press)

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from the leaders. As a result, I didn't get much help. In retrospect, I'm sure I avoided drawing attention to myself. I didn't want anyone to get involved in—or "mess up"—my life or suggest that I should be living it more "Christianly." I acted like I had no needs, so no one offered to help me. Without any relational ties to the kids or the leaders, I wasn't held accountable by anyone. Eventually, I had no reason to go to the group, except for my desire to please my mother, and soon, that wasn't enough.

Christina's Story

Although Jocelyn and I are relatively different, we had similar experiences as "alternative-type" females in youth groups designed to encourage and accommodate the more typical junior high or high school students. When I started high school, my mother insisted I attend Sunday school at her church. But even before I got there, I figured that I would not become friends with the girls at church. I was, and still am, what others like to call a "tomboy." In my friendships, I generally gravitated toward guys. If my female friendships extended beyond the sports field, it was only with the other bold, outspoken, quick-tempered girls.

The first time I came to the church group, my suspicions were confirmed. Most of the girls wore skirts and sat together giggling about boys. It seemed clear to me that they were interested in entirely different things than I was. At first I sat quietly in the back, unnoticed for the most part. Later on, I ventured to join some boys who were playing basketball.

Years before, I had perfected the skill of appearing to have it "all together"—but I actually had quite a few problems. My struggles didn't seem to be the same as the other girls', though, so I felt uncomfortable about sharing them with people who I suspected wouldn't be able to relate or

girls in the group. Those were the ones they attended to and ministered to. I didn't fall neatly into one of those established groups. Therefore, the leaders didn't know what to do with me—and so they did nothing.

That's not to say that I would have wanted to be one of *their* girls. When they did occasionally treat me the way they did the other girls, I probably didn't respond the way they were used to. Typically, the other kids took turns vying for the attention of the leaders. I, on the other hand, met their artificial gaiety and over-dramatized sympathy with mixed feelings of disgust and distrust. Later on, after I decided to try to become a part of the group, I think the youth workers had finally realized that they could use my leadership. But I resented that they had never recognized or encouraged those qualities in me before that time.

What We Suggest

We realize that many adults forget that each student has individual needs. Youth groups (to say nothing of the churches they represent) can often seem to get a little "cult-ish." Everybody is encouraged to think the same way and like the same things. Those who do not conform are not as valued. Many youth leaders tend to discourage or ignore those who seem different. We wonder if this would change if the adult leaders would take interest in the lives of *all* the students who come to the group. Then the other kids probably would be more accepting of the atypical, as well as the typical kids. Those students who feel they have gained the youth leader's seal of approval will view the church group as a refuge. Those who do not will naturally feel that they don't belong—or are unwelcome.

How can youth workers make alternative-type kids feel like they are an important part of the group and an important asset to the Kingdom of God, without detracting from their ministry to the group as a whole? Most people, once they perceive that they are genuinely liked, will respond by actively involving themselves in a relationship. In this case, that relationship is the one they have with the church group—students and youth workers included.

As we've matured, we've found that it doesn't actually take very much time or energy to bring individuals such as we were to the point where they feel wanted or appreciated. The kids at your church who stand out as being "different" are used to being on the fringes of a group, and generally embrace that difference. This means it's okay if they never become part of the "in" clique. Assimilation is not their goal. They value their individuality and do not want to lose that by joining "the masses." It is important, however, that

they have a personal relationship with at least one of the youth workers—you, for example.

This type of relationship does not require an excessive amount of time or commitment on your part. They don't expect you to neglect the group to accommodate them. A single, one-on-one get-together every once in a while would be sufficient. This could mean inviting them to grab lunch with you at MacDonald's, or asking them if they'd be interested in going to a sports event, an art gallery, or a musical—depending on their interests. The key is to get them alone, somewhere that they feel comfortable, other than at church.

It's also important to share a bit about your own life and shortcomings. It may require a little openness on your part before they'll trust you enough to share with you what's going on in their life. Whenever you see them

around church after that, a brief "Hey—how ya doing?" and a sincere smile will probably be enough. They'll be more interested in having a personal, focused relationship with you *outside* church than in spending time with you while you're with the group.

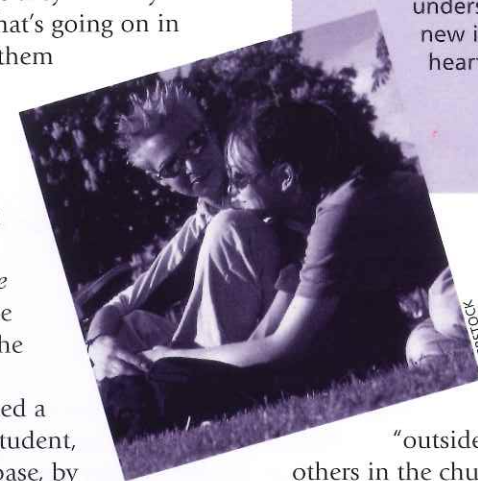
Once you have established a relationship with a specific student, you can occasionally touch base, by phone or E-mail, to remind the outsider of the group's upcoming events. Most kids are contacted by their friends in the group. However, someone who doesn't have a base of church friends tends to feel like his or her presence is inconsequential. You may want to invite that outsider student to a more evangelistic activity—like a summer camp or retreat—that your youth group is participating in. Or you might provide an opportunity where alternative types can bring their other friends to an event where both Christians and non-Christian kids can get to know each other without the focus being on "winning them" to Christ.

Personal testimonies or "sharing" times by youth workers and other church members are great opportunities to reach kids who seem uninterested or unreachable. When an atypical student discovers that these more "mainstream" adults have had problems and struggles and lapses of faith just like

they are having, they may realize that their own situation isn't so unique after all. After such a meeting has ended, it's important to make sure that the person who shared his or her story remains accessible to the students, in case they want to talk more with them. People feel more comfortable about approaching others who seem similar to them. For this reason, it might be helpful to seek out alternative-type college students

Inasmuch as most adults have forgotten the painful emotions associated with becoming adult, they tend to imagine the adolescent years as brimming with opportunity. They see the adolescent as having infinite possibilities for love relationships, friendships, interests in dance, music, clothes, learning, work. They do not *always* understand why the new loves and friendships, the passionate new interests, usually prove to be unstable, transient, and heartbreakingly disappointing.

Louise J. Kaplan, *Psychologist*
Adolescence: The Farewell to Childhood
(Touchstone, 1984)



or church members to help in the leadership of the group during such sharing times, as well as to participate in the group's weekly gatherings.

Another suggestion is to ask "outsider" kids to join in an activity that others in the church are involved in. That could be a game of basketball after church with the "jocks," or an invitation to practice their acoustical guitar with the worship band. Don't worry if there aren't any other kids from the group participating in those activities. Alternative types are often more accustomed to hanging out with others than the more typical church kids.

We hope our stories and suggestions have given you a better understanding of the problems—as well as some solutions—involved in ministering to those who seem "different" than the others.

Good luck in working with *all* of God's children,

Christina Jacobson
and Jocelyn Sherman

Christina Jacobson and Jocelyn Sherman are junior students at Azusa Pacific University in Southern California. Both are preparing for Christian leadership in today's world.

If we preach a gospel that neglects the welfare of the whole in exchange for the happiness of the individual, then the church as a living, pulsing body is weakened, as is the welfare of the family. We must recover the priority of interrelationships.

Dennis Guernsey
A New Design for Family Ministry
(David C. Cook, 1982)

sympathize. When we met in "gender-segregated" small groups, I was forced to listen to all the soap-opera sagas of the other girls. This contributed to my general mistrust of my female schoolmates.

I had other reasons for not volunteering to actively involve myself with the youth group. It became apparent to me that the leaders had *their*

It doesn't
actually take
very much
time or
energy to
bring
individuals
such as we
were to the
point where
they feel
wanted or
appreciated.

Upcoming Events

AUGUST

- 3-4 Alpha Conference, Chicago, Illinois*
- 22-24 Returning Student Registration, Fall Quarter, Fuller campus
- 24-25 Alpha Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah *
- 28-29 Alpha Conference, Bellevue, Washington*

SEPTEMBER

- 8-9 NCD Workshop II, "Cultivating Healthy Churches," Mesa, Arizona*
- 26 NCD Workshop I, "Cultivating Healthy Churches," Pasadena, California*

OCTOBER

- 10-12 Payton Lectures, School of Theology, with the Reverend Professor Kwame Bediako of Ghana, speaking on "Africa in the New World Christian Order," Fuller campus
- 11-12 Alpha Conference, Milpitas, California*
- 17-18 Oak Brook Conference on Ministry, Oak Brook, Illinois*
- 27-28 NCD Workshop II, "Cultivating Healthy Churches, Pasadena, California*

NOVEMBER

- 1-2 Annual Missiology Lectures, School of World Mission, Fuller campus***
- 4 "Fuller Visits" Grand Rapids, Alumni/ae, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

* For more information, call the Office of Continuing Education at 1-800-999-9578.

** For more information, call the Office of Alumni/ae Relations at 1-626-584-5498.

***For more information, call the School of World Mission at 1-626-584-5260.